patents being taken on certain products which are not considered patentable, steps are taken to assess whether the grant of patent can be challenged.

Inclusion of 'Navsudra' Caste of Bengali Refugees in SC Category

†*217. SHRI MANOHAR KANT DHYANI: Will the Minister of SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT be pleased to refer to answer to Unstarred Question No. 1309 given in the Rajya Sabha on 8th June, 1998 and state whether Government would take measures to include 'Navsudra caste' of Bengali refugees in Scheduled Caste immediately?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EMPOWERMENT (SHRIMATI MANEKA GANDHI): The matter is being examined in consultation with Government of Uttar Pradesh and the Registrar General of India in the light of modalities approved by the Cabinet Committee on Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Minorities on 15.06.1999. No time can be specified as proposals are received from time to time and processed in accordance with prescribed procedure.

Performance of Steel Plants under SAIL

*218. DR. MOHAN BABU: Will the Minister of STEEL be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that all steel plants under Steel Authority of India are incurring huge losses for the past few years;

(b) if so, the plant-wise performance during the last three years and the reasons for huge losses; and

(c) the steps taken by Government to improve the performance of the steel plants in the country?

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† Original Notice of the question was received in Hindi.

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF STEEL (SHRI DILIP RAY): (a) and (b) No, Sir. The plant-wise details of net profit/loss(−) of all plants under Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) for the last three years are as under:—

(Rs. in Crores)

PLANT	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99
Bhilai Steel Plant	684	701	301
Bokaro Steel Plant	357	367	(−)165
Durgapur Steel Plant	(−)236	(−)509	(−)719
Rourkela Steel Plant	(−)316	(−)374	(−)765
Alloy Steels Plant	(−)67	(−)88	(−)179
Salem Steel Plant	(−)38	(−)120	(−)180
Visvesvaraya Iron & Steel Ltd.*	(−)102	(−)84	(−)74
Indian Iron & Steel Co. Ltd.	(−)213	(−)395	(−)357
Maharashtra Electrosmelt Ltd.	(−)1.6	1.5	(−)11.1

*VISL was merged with SAIL with effect from 01/04/1998.

The reasons for losses, *inter-alia*, are:

(i) Slow down in demand for steel;

(ii) Greater competition from imports and enhancement in supplies in domestic markets resulting in lower sales realisations;

(iii) Increase in input costs;

(iv) Higher interest and depreciation cost mainly because of capitalisation of modernisation and other capital schemes; and

(v) Labour intensive operation and high manpower cost.

(c) Government is in constant dialogue with SAIL and is periodically reviewing its performance with a view to increasing its competitiveness and efficiency. Accordingly, to check losses and improve the financial health of SAIL, the Company has drawn up a comprehensive financial and business restructuring plan.

A comprehensive turnaround proposal for revival of the Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Ltd. (Viskhapatnam Steel Plant) has been drawn up by the Company.

Government provides an appropriate policy regime to encourage adoption of modern cost effective technologies in the steel plants in the country. Initiatives/steps for improving the performance of the steel plants in the private sector have to come from the entrepreneurs/management themselves.

Exporters' Woes for Speed Money

†*219. SHRI BARJINDER SINGH HAMDARD:
SHRI BALWANT SINGH RAMOOWALIA:

Will the Minister of COMMERCE & INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the news-item published in the Economic Times, dated 13th November, 1999 under the caption "Speed Money adds to Exporters' Woes: W.B.";

(b) if so, whether it is a fact that the Indian exporters' expenditure at the ports of the country is higher than the expenditure incurred by foreign exporters at the posts of their countries;

(c) if so, the facts in this regard;

(d) the reason for this excess expenditure and whether Government have explored the possibilities of minimising these expenses; and

(e) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) to (c) The Government has come across such a news item. The Government is not aware of any speed money charges being paid by the exporters. However, the Government has

†Original Notice of the Question was received in Hindi.